

THE MARTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF '中' [ZHONG]

Translation & Commentary By Adrian Chan-Wyles PhD

Essentially, the term 'Zhongguo' (中國) can be translated as the 'Middle Country', but the ideogram '中' (Zhong) is not new and has many connotations ascribed to it. Specifically, I was asked about whether it is true that '中' (Zhong) can also be used to refer to the martial art of 'archery' as implied by the British Sinologist James Legge (1815-1897)—in his English language translation of the Confucian text he termed the 'Doctrine of the Mean' (中庸 - Zhong Yong).

To test this hypothesis the history of the term '中' (Zhong) must be examined in greater detail. The earliest extant example of the '中' (Zhong) ideogram can be dated to the Oracle Bone Inscriptions and the Bronze Character Inscriptions (c. 1250 BCE or earlier) both produced within the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BCE). An early Oracle Bone Inscription example is as follows:



This denotes a 'drum' placed in the centre of an open space—flanked by two Clan (or Tribal) banners blowing in the wind. Indeed, one explanation for the pronunciation of 'Zhong' is that it represents the sound the drum makes when struck (this is one of two 'tones' used within the Chinese language to express this ideogram—i.e. 'zhōng' as opposed to 'zhōng'). In reality, the '口' (kou) particle represents an open 'mouth'. This is important within Chinese philosophical thought as the (upper) mouth denotes the 'Divine Sky', while the (lower) mouth stands for the 'Broad Earth'.

Both extremes are brought together when the mouth is closed (and also when the tongue, which is attached to the lower mouth 'touches' the palate of the upper mouth—an image which figures prominently within Daoist self-cultivation). This 'unity' is indicated by the '丨' (gun) straight line.

Within Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) this particle suggests a two-way flow of 'hidden' but 'empowering' energy that travels from divine sky through 'middle' (which represents all life, including humanity) and into ground where it naturally 'rebounds' and reverses its course from lower, to middle and upper, etc.

When all is perfectly balanced, this two-way energy flow occurs simultaneously and without contradiction. In this regard, a developed ideogram more fully expressing this world view may be observed in '王' (wang) as



a Trigram (found in the *Change Classic*—'Yijing' or 'Zhouyi' [易經]). The right person 'unites' (丨) the 'Broad Earth', the 'Middle Country' (full of biological life), and the 'Divine Sky' (which contains the Sun, Moon and 'Five' planets observable with the human eye, the origin of the 'Five Phases' [五行 - Wu Xing] world view).

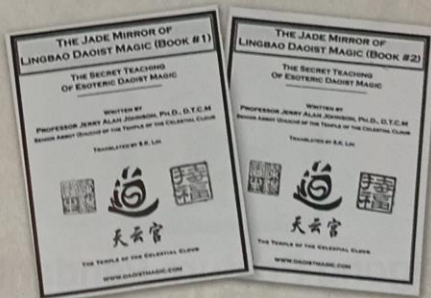
Therefore, it says in the ancient divination (Oracle Bone) texts:

此字可疑。
岂浅人误以屈中之虫入此坎。
An auspicious word.

Only people of limited understanding
mistake an 'open' mouth for
containing an insect.

Those who adopt a 'centrality' (中) of mind
and body naturally operate from a position of
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a superior moderation—as there is no tendency to lean toward the inferior behavior associated with either extreme. This perfectly centered orientation of human consciousness (and behavior) is believed to directly benefit human society. The following is also stated in the (Earlier Han Dynasty) text entitled the 'New Book' (新书—*Xin Shu*) in the Chapter entitled 'Category of Distance' (属远—*Shu Yun*):

古者天子地方千里，中之而为都。
'In ancient times, the Emperor's territory measured thousands of miles - and yet the capital was established in the centre.'

Although Confucius favored both military and academic study, he adhered to these ideas because such practices were already established throughout ancient China by the time he was born. As far as Confucius was concerned, he was not inventing or advocating anything new, but was reinforcing and emphasizing the traditional values that already existed within Chinese society.

Martial arts, particularly archery, is mentioned in many (and various) Chinese language texts prior to Confucius. An example of this can be found in the Zhou Dynasty text of the 'Zhou Rites' (周礼—*Zhou Li*) in the Chapter entitled the 'Archery Master' (射人—*She Ren*) referring to an expert archer who specializes in the ritual of correctly shooting arrows into an inanimate target:

与太史数射中。
'The Grand Historian fired arrows and the target's center was repeatedly hit.'

A Confucian development of this martial concept can be found in the 'Rites Record' (礼记—*Li Ji*) text in the Chapter entitled 'Shooting Righteously' (射义—*She Yi*):

持弓矢审固，然后可以言中。
故盛算之器即日中。
'Notch the arrow to the string whilst correctly assessing the weight and balance of the drawn bow. In this way, each released arrow directly hits the centre of the target. This level of physical accuracy is developed through expanding the awareness - so that a calm mind embraces the centre of the target.'

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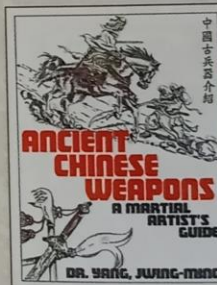
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acter through the correct wielding of the writing-brush, the sword and the bow—which then leads to soundly governing the country and bringing peace to the world. This is how the Confucian-Scholars succinctly interpreted the traditions that existed before, to the generations that came after.

As a Scholar-Official was expected to keep the peace without resorting to the drawing of deadly weapons, and it is probable that weaponed martial arts were supplemented with their unarmed equivalents.

There is some speculation that 'Taijiquan' (太极拳) or something similar to the 'Grand Ridge-Pole Fist' is a candidate for this 'Confucian' unarmed martial art on the grounds that the concept of 'Taiji' (太极) as found in the 'Great Treatise' Commentary (易经 - Da Zhuan) of the 'Change Classic' (易经 - Yi Jing) and is a 'Confucian' concept later borrowed into Daoist philosophy.

The techniques of 'rooting' whilst 'opening the joints' as found within Taijiquan, appear to be a preparation for 'drawing' and 'firing' the bow (as reflected in the 'Daoyin'



James Legge - Archery and Hitting the Mark as a Test of Character

[導引] and 'Qigong' [氣功] equivalent practices of 'Drawing the Bow' [画弓-Hua Gong]. Many of the movements of contemporary Taijiquan are clearly recorded on the 'Mawangdui' (馬王堆) silk manuscript which dates to 168 BCE.

Chinese ideograms are comprised of particles that can be interpreted to represent many similar (or occasionally 'different') aspects or things. Overtime, a shift often occurs in interpretation which reflects the outer changes in society. The 'archery' interpretation is logical and builds upon the idea conveyed within the

Oracle Bone Inscriptions which suggests that a firm shaft (or a bladed spear) is thrust firmly into the 'receptive earth' so as to facilitate a strong totem-type presence that denotes both 'location' and 'identity'. Meanwhile, a 'drum' is correctly 'hit' so as to signal the bringing together of the masses.

This ritualistic activity allows the 'identity' symbolism to be effectively facilitated. A structured activity equates to a successful transformation of the material world. These are very powerful elements within Chinese identity forming. As Chinese society developed and evolved, these core ideas were retained but experienced changes in their physical structure. A staff thrust into the earth became an arrow, while a drum being struck by a beater became a target being pierced.

The ritualistic attitude that solemnly brought the ancient tribe into the center of the sacred 'open space' transitioned into the required psychological and physical discipline required to hold, draw, aim and fire a bow so that the arrow could strike the centre of the designated target.

These changes were dependent upon the staff evolving to a bladed-spear, and the bow

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and arrow evolving to a high-functioning weapon. Behind these technical developments were the intelligent abilities of the craftsmen and metal-smiths that transformed Chinese society.

Perhaps during the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BCE) the staff and the bladed-spear were venerated as the ideal weapon (this attitude would evolve to include the veneration of axes during the latter Shang) as this is the weapon of choice reflected in the Bone Oracle Inscriptions. During the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) however, the spear was superseded by the use of the bow and arrow, culminating in the use of it being extolled by Confucius himself.

This suggests that although ancient China possessed a plethora of well-made weaponry requiring highly-skilled manipulation, certain tools of warfare were elevated to the level of 'spiritual doorways' representing a higher plain of perception and a pathway of perfected actuality. The veneration of the bow and arrow probably reached its peak during the middle to latter Zhou Dynasty, and this is the era within which the ideogram '中' (Zhong)

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starts to be associated (through interpretation) with the enlightened activity of 'hitting the mark' via the vehicle of ritualistic 'archery'.

As James Legge was specifically translating a Confucian text from this era, he was indeed correct to associate this ideogram with the art of 'archery' as used as a ritualistic device used to purify the mind, discipline the body and bring inner and outer order to society. This knowledge could be used to interpret the name of China as being the 'Land of Perfected Archers' (Confucian Scholar-Officials had to fire the bow with equal accuracy using both sides of their bodies)—as 'hitting the mark' at the 'centre of the target' is always assured! ■

Chinese Language Texts:

<https://zhihu.com> (为什么说中文不是“象形文字”之七 - 知乎)

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/中/977204>

<https://www.zdic.net/hans/中>

English Language Reference:

Werner Eichhorn: *Chinese Civilisation—An Introduction*, Translated By Janet Seligman, Faber, (1969), (Originally Published in German—1964)

James Legge, Confucius, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean*, Chinese Texts; Translation with Exegetical Notes and Dictionary of all Characters, Dover [New York], (1883 [Originally] & 1971). See Page 384 (Footnote 4) & Page 413 (Footnote 18) for Specific Mention of '中' (Zhong) in Main Text of the '*Doctrine of the Mean*'. For a Discussion of 'Archery' and 'Hitting the Middle of the Target', See Page 396 (Footnote 5). For Confucius (*Analects*) Discussing Natural Archery, See Page 157 (Footnote 7) and Page 160 (Footnote 16) for 'Not Going Through the Leather of the Target'



Adrian Chan-Wyles specializes in the forensic translation of old and contemporary historical, political and cultural Chinese texts into the English language—working with both

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